

### IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

CHRISTINE FERRELL, as Parent and Legal Guardian of BILLIE ORTIZ

Plaintiff

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA, PAUL
VALLAS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; HAMILTON
DISSTON SCHOOL; HAMILTON DISSTON
VICE PRINCIPAL WILSON; HAMILTON
DISSTON DISCIPLINARIAN PRENDERGAST;
HAMILTON DISSTON NURSE GREENLEE;
HAMILTON DISSTON SECURITY GUARD FRED,
individually and as employees for the School District
Of Philadelphia and/or Hamilton Disston School
Defendants

JURY TRIAL DEMAND

07 1017

C.A. No. 07-



#### COMPLAINT

#### I. JURISDICTION

 This action is brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1343(1),(3),(4) and the aforementioned statutory provision.

#### II. PARTIES

- Plaintiff, Billie Ortiz is a minor female who was at all times relevant to this Complaint, a resident of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her mother, Christine Ferrell is her natural parent and legal guardian.
- 3. Defendant School District of Philadelphia is a local agency in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and at all times relevant hereto operated under the color of state law in creating and maintaining the educational standards for children attending public schools in Philadelphia, was the employer of all Defendants and had



the responsibility of adopting policies, implementing procedures and practices to educate the children of Philadelphia.

- 4. Defendant Hamilton Disston School is an agency in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and at all times relevant hereto operated under the color of state law in creating and maintaining the educational standards for children attending public schools in Philadelphia, was the employer of all Defendants and had the responsibility of adopting policies, implementing procedures and practices to educate the children of Philadelphia.
- 5. Defendant Vallas, is and was at all times relevant to this Complaint, the Executive Director for the School District of Philadelphia and acting under the color of state law. He is being sued in both his individual and official capacities.
- 6. Defendant Wilson, is and was at all times relevant to this Complaint, a vice principal for the Hamilton Disston School and acting under the color of state law. He is being sued in both his individual and official capacities.
- 7. Defendant Prendergast, is and was at all times relevant to this Complaint, a disciplinarian for the Hamilton Disston School and acting under the color of state law.
  She is being sued in both her individual and official capacities.
- 8. Defendant Fred, is and was at all times relevant to this Complaint, a security guard for the Hamilton Disston School and acting under the color of state law. He is being sued in both his individual and official capacities.

9. Defendant Greenlee, is and was at all times relevant to this Complaint, a nurse for the Hamilton Disston School and acting under the color of state law. She is being sued in both her individual and official capacities.

#### III. FACTS

- 10. In and around January, 2007, Plaintiff Billie Ortiz, a 14 year old female was enrolled in the Hamilton Disston School as a student.
- 11. While in mathematics class on that date, she was ordered to proceed outside in the hallway, where she was met by Defendant Wilson, Defendant Prendergast and Defendant Fred.
- 12. While in the hallway she was informed by Defendants that they believed she possessed drugs and the Defendants searched her book bag for narcotics without Plaintiff's permission. After finding no narcotics, Plaintiff was ordered to return back to her classroom.
- 13. Shortly after returning back to her classroom, the Defendants again came to Plaintiff's classroom and ordered her to proceed to the Disciplinarian's Office where a further search was conducted. The Defendants searched Plaintiff's pockets and she was ordered to remove her shoes and socks. The Defendants searched her shoes and socks, finding no contraband.
  - 14. Plaintiff was then escorted to the Nurse's Office.
- 15. At the Nurse's Office, Defendant Prendergast and Defendant Greenlee then ordered Plaintiff to remove her clothes.

- 16. Plaintiff was ordered to remove her pants and pull her shirt up to her neck exposing her brassier and underwear. Defendant Prendergast then conducted a strip search by physically placing her hands inside Plaintiff's underwear and feeling around and her brassier touching her breast while searching for drugs.
  - 17. No contraband was found.
- 18. Plaintiff's mother, Christina Ferrell was never contacted by Defendants during the strip search.
- 19. The foregoing conduct of the Defendants, acting under the color of state law, was undertaken in concert and conspiracy and as part of an effort to unlawfully strip search Plaintiff and otherwise deprive Plaintiff of her civil and constitutional rights including Plaintiff's rights, privileges and immunities under the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- 20. At no time did Plaintiff commit any offense against the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for which a strip search may be lawfully made. At no time did Plaintiff commit any illegal acts or engage in any conduct, which in any way justified the actions of all Defendants.
- 21. As a direct and proximate result of the Defendants' actions, Plaintiff suffered serious injury.
- 22. As a direct and proximate result of the Defendants' actions, Plaintiff suffered and continues to suffer serious mental anguish, psychological and emotional distress, and pain and suffering, some or all of which may be permanent.

- 23. As a direct and proximate result of the Defendants' actions, Plaintiff was detained and unlawfully strip searched without just or probable cause.
- 24. The actions of Defendants were undertaken in a menacing and arbitrary manner, designed to cause Plaintiff fear, distress and embarrassment.
- 25. The acts of Defendants Wilson, Prendergast, Fred and Greenlee were committed willfully, wantonly, maliciously, intentionally, outrageously, deliberately and/or by conduct so egregious as to shock the conscience.
- 26. The acts and omissions of the undivided Defendants were committed without cautious regard to due care, and with such wanton and reckless disregard of the consequences as to show Defendants' indifference to the danger of harm and injury.
- 27. The individual Defendants conspired to inflict harm on Plaintiff and deprive her constitutional rights.
- 28. Defendants Wilson, Prendergast, Fred and Greenlee made statements to officials in order to conceal their unlawful and unconstitutional conduct.
- 29. Defendants Wilson, Prendergast, Fred and Greenlee engaged in the aforesaid conduct for the purpose of violating Plaintiff's constitutional rights by subjecting her to unreasonable search and seizure, unlawful strip search, depriving Plaintiff of property and liberty without due process of law.
- 30. As a direct and proximate result of the Defendants' illegal and unconstitutional actions, Plaintiff suffered pain, fear, anxiety, embarrassment, loss of liberty, confinement, physical injuries, severe emotional trauma, and the loss of the enjoyment of life, all to her great detriment and loss.

## FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

- 31. The allegations set forth in paragraphs 1-30 inclusive, are incorporated herein as if fully set forth.
- 32. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' above described unlawful and malicious conduct, committed under the color of state law, and while acting in that capacity, the Defendants deprived Plaintiff of the equal protection of the laws and Plaintiff's rights, privileges and immunities under the laws and the Constitution of the United States. Plaintiff's right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures, strip searches, to be secure in one's person and property, to access to the Courts, and to due process and equal protection of the law, all to Plaintiff's great detriment and loss. As a result, Plaintiff suffered grievous harm, in violation of her rights under the laws and Constitution of the United States in particular the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments thereof, and 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
- 33. As a direct and proximate result of the acts and omissions of Defendants, Plaintiff was forced to endure great pain and mental suffering, and was deprived of physical liberty, all to Plaintiff's great detriment and loss.
- 34. The School District of Philadelphia and/or Hamilton Disston School permitted, encouraged, tolerated, ratified and was deliberately indifferent to a pattern, practice and custom of:
  - a. Unjustified, unreasonable and illegal use of any authority to conduct strip searches of students;

- b. Abuse of powers, including harassment, improper searches and unlawful strip searches;
- e. Psychologically or emotionally unfit persons serving as school officials;
   and
- d. Failure of school officials to prevent, deter, report or take action against the unlawful conduct of school officials under such circumstances as presented herein.
- 35. Defendants, School District of Philadelphia and/or Hamilton Disston School were deliberately indifferent to the need to:
  - Test its employees for emotional and psychological fitness to serve as school officials;
  - Monitor teachers and security officers whom it knew or should have known were suffering from emotional and/or psychological problems that impair their ability to function as school officials;
  - c. Train its school officials in the appropriate exercise of search functions;
  - d. Facilitated, encouraged, tolerated, ratified, and/or was deliberately indifferent to school officials using their status as employees of the Hamilton Disston School to initiate actions by its employees which are intended to harm its students, and
  - e. Failure to properly train, supervise and discipline school officials and other Hamilton Disston School employees with regard to practices, which are, initiated which help and not harm its students.

- 36. The School District of Philadelphia and/or Hamilton Disston School was deliberately indifferent to the need for more or different training, supervision, investigation or discipline in the areas of:
  - a. Use of search procedures of students by school officials force by police;
  - b. Exercise of school powers;
  - c. School officials with emotional or psychological problems; and
  - d. School officials' use of their status as school officials to have students unlawfully strip search students or to achieve ends not reasonably related to their school duties.
- 37. The School District of Philadelphia and/or Hamilton Disston School failed to properly sanction or discipline school officials, who are aware of and conceal and/or aid and abet violations of constitutional rights of students by other school officials, thereby causing and encouraging school officials, including the Defendant school officials in this case, to violate the rights of students such as Plaintiff.
- 38. The foregoing acts, omissions, systemic deficiencies and deliberate indifference to the danger or harm to students like the Plaintiff and the need for more or different training, investigation and discipline are policies and customs of the School District of Philadelphia and/or Hamilton Disston School and have caused school officials, including Defendant school officials in this case, to believe that they can violate the rights of students, with impunity, including the use of fraud and falsehood and to believe that such conduct would be honestly and properly investigated, all with the foreseeable result that school officials are more likely to violate the constitutional rights of students.

- 39. The actions of all Defendants, acting under the color of state law and/or in concert or conspiracy with each other, deprived Plaintiff of her rights, privileges and immunities under the laws and Constitution of the United States, in particular, the rights to be secure in one's person and property, to be free from unlawful searches, unlawful strip searches and to due process of law.
- 40. Defendants, School District of Philadelphia and/or Hamilton Disston School and the individual named Defendants, acting in concert and conspiracy with each other, have by the aforementioned actions deprived Plaintiff of her constitutional and statutory rights.
- 41. By these actions, all Defendants have deprived Plaintiff of her rights secured by the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution in violation of 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

#### PUNITIVE DAMAGES

- 42. Plaintiff re-alleges paragraphs 1-41 of this complaint as though fully set forth herein.
- 43. The conduct of the individual Defendants was outrageous, malicious, wanton, willful, reckless and intentionally designed to inflict harm upon Plaintiff.
- 44. As a result of the acts of the individual defendants alleged in the preceding paragraphs, Plaintiff is entitled to punitive damages as to each cause of action.

#### JURY DEMAND

- 45. Plaintiff demands a jury trial as to each Defendant and as to each count.
  WHEREFORE, plaintiff requests the following relief:
  - a. Compensatory damages;

- b. Punitive damages;
- c. A declaratory judgment that the practices and policies complained of are unconstitutional;
- d. Reasonable attorney's fees and costs; and
- e. Such other and further relief as appears reasonable and just.

DATED: 3/14/07

MICHAEL PILEGGI, ESQUIRE

437 Chestnut Street, Suite 905

Philadelphia, PA 19106 Counsel for Plaintiff

# Case 2:07-cv-01017-MAM Document 1 Filed 03/14/07 Page 11 of 13 CIVIL COVER SHEET 0 7 10

©JS 44 (Rev. 11/04)

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE REVERSE OF THE FORM.)

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195 Contract Product Liability	☐ 360 Other Personal	Product Liability	730 Labor/Mgmt.Reporting & Disclosure Act	☐ 864 SSID Title XVI ☐ 865 RSI (405(g))	890 Other Statutory Actions     891 Agricultural Acts	
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#### UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

07 1017

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA — DESIGNATION FO purpose of assignment to appropriate calendar.	RM to be used by counsel to indicate the category of the case if
Address of Plaintiff: 6818 VAN DIKE STREET 64	IILA.
Address of Defendant: 6801 COTTAGE STREET PH	HILA, PA
Place of Accident, Incident or Transaction: 6801 COTTAGE	SPREET PHILA PA
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1. Is this case related to property included in an earlier numbered suit pending	or within one year previously terminated action in this court?
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A. Federal Question Cases:	B. Diversity Jurisdiction Cases:
1. Indemnity Contract, Marine Contract, and All Other Contracts	Insurance Contract and Other Contracts
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3. Jones Act-Personal Injury	3. Assault, Defamation
4. Antitrust	4. Marine Personal Injury
5. Patent	5. Motor Vehicle Personal Injury
Labor-Management Relations	Other Personal Injury (Please specify)
Civil Rights	7. Products Liability
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Pursuant to Local Civil Rule 53.2, Section 3(c)(2), that to the best of my known exceed the sum of \$150,000,00 exclusive of interest and costs:	
Relief other than monetary damages is sought.	
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NOTE: A trial de novo will be a trial by jury only if then	
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= 3/14/07 MICHAEL TILE	601 61558
Attorney-at-Law	Attorney I.D.#

APPENDIX I

# IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

	MANAGEMENT TRACK DES	SIGNATION FORM
CHRISTINA FERRELL ASPARE GUARDIAN FOR BILLIE ORTI	9	CIVIL ACTION
SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PH	HLADER BHIA :	07 1017 NO.
plaintiff shall complete a ca filing the complaint and ser- side of this form.) In the designation, that defendant the plaintiff and all other pa	ase Management Track Designat we a copy on all defendants. (See event that a defendant does not shall, with its first appearance,	deduction Plan of this court, counsel for tion Form in all civil cases at the time of § 1:03 of the plan set forth on the reverse t agree with the plaintiff regarding said submit to the clerk of court and serve on designation form specifying the track to
SELECT ONE OF THE F	COLLOWING CASE MANAGE	EMENT TRACKS:
(a) Habeas Corpus - Cases	s brought under 28 U.S.C. §2241	through §2255. ( )
	s requesting review of a decision enying plaintiff Social Security E	
(c) Arbitration - Cases requ	uired to be designated for arbitra	tion under Local Civil Rule 53.2. ( )
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3/14/07 Date	MICHAEL PILEGO/ Attorney-at-law	BILLIE ORTIZ  Attorney for
215-627-8516	215-627-5105	PILAZZE AOL. COM
Telephone	FAX Number	E-Mail Address